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WILDLIFE SERVICES—NEW YORK

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in New York

Every day, New York residents, industries, organizations, municipalities and agencies call on New York Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and professional strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

New York is a diverse ecological mix of urban and suburban settings and agricultural and forested environments that are also home to nearly 19 million people. New York State has 47,223 square miles of land with another 7,000 square miles of inland water. Accordingly, WS works to reduce public safety risks and property damage by managing wildlife populations at airports, protecting domestic pets and livestock from rabies, and guarding many natural resources such as fisheries from bird depredation.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology. While WS conducts a wide range of operational and research activities, a few in-depth

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Reducing public health threats from raccoon rabies
- Protecting public safety and aircraft operations from wildlife hazards at airports
- Protecting public health, property, and natural resources from gulls and other birds
- Protecting property and crops from damage caused by resident Canada geese
- Protecting property and public health from damage caused by large, urban crow roosts

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to New York

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing blackbird damage to feedlots
- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies
- Reducing colonial waterbird damage to aquaculture
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs



examples are provided to highlight WS' role in protecting public health and safety, crops, property, and natural resources from wildlife threats and damage.

Reducing the Occurrence of Rabies—Raccoon rabies first appeared in New York in 1990. The disease quickly spread northward and is now present throughout most of the State. In 1998, WS initiated an intensive, multi-year oral vaccination program in an attempt to curtail the northward spread of rabies. WS is leading a cooperative effort with the New York State Department of Health, the Cornell University Diagnostic Laboratory, and other agencies to distribute the oral rabies vaccine (ORV) in critical areas of the State. Each vaccine is encased in a bait attractive to raccoons. When a raccoon bites into the bait, a pouch containing the vaccine is punctured, vaccinating the raccoon.

In 2001, WS initiated a study focusing on raccoon populations and the efficacy of the ORV baiting program in Jefferson, Oswego, and St. Lawrence Counties in northwestern New York. More than 2.1 million baits were distributed in 2001 across the target area, covering a 5,953 square-mile area. Since the initiation of the program, the number of reported terrestrial rabies cases in the targeted area has decreased by more than 98 percent.

Protecting World Trade Center Recovery Workers—Following the tragic events at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, New York WS joined recovery efforts at the Staten Island Landfill where 1.7 million tons of wreckage from the twin towers was sorted. While workers sifted through the mountains of debris looking for evidence and the remains and personal belongings of victims, a rotating team of WS specialists worked from dawn until well after dusk, seven days a week to keep gulls and other birds from landing at the site and harassing the recovery workers. These specialists used an effective combination of harmless noisemakers and pyrotechnic devices, red laser lights, and bird effigies to successfully keep the gulls away and reduce wildlife conflicts.

Protecting Air Travel—Bird strikes with airplanes cost civil aviation more than \$470 million annually in the United States and pose a hazard to flight crews and passengers. From 1979 to 2002, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) reported between 80 and 315 aircraft collisions each year with birds at John F. Kennedy (JFK) International Airport. During this time, bird strikes at JFK resulted in 25 aborted takeoffs and at least 58 incidents resulting in substantial damage.

WS researchers define the cutting edge of wildlife damage management science and are constantly working to improve existing management strategies in order to address problems such as bird collisions with aircraft. Through research conducted at JFK, WS scientists demonstrated the effectiveness of brush removal on airport grounds and the importance of regular mowing of grassland areas to reduce the number of birds and small mammals using the airport to feed and loaf. In response to these findings, PANYNJ launched a major shift in vegetation management at the airport.

Initiating a cooperative, integrated approach, WS helped to reduce laughing gull strikes (the species of primary concern) at JFK by 76 percent to 99 percent from 1992 through 2001. Bird strikes by 3 other problematic gull species were reduced from 48 percent to 76 percent during the same time period. A 99 percent reduction in laughing gull strikes was achieved for the first time in 2000 when only three such strikes were reported at JFK compared with an average of 157 strikes each year from 1988-1990.

Protecting Aquaculture and Natural Resources—Estimated costs associated with bird damage and damage prevention for the aquaculture industry exceed \$17 million annually. WS conducts research to determine the magnitude of the problem and develop methods to reduce damage by fish-eating birds to southeastern catfish, baitfish, and crawfish production. The same research will provide additional strategies for the management of cormorants on sport fish in New York.

New York has a number of breeding areas, including Lake Champlain, Lake Ontario, and Oneida Lake, for colonial waterbirds such as gulls and cormorants. These birds pose threats to public health and safety, crops, property, and natural resources. Since 1998 when WS began participating in a cooperative harassment program to reduce the impact of cormorants on fisheries in Oneida Lake, cormorant damage has been dramatically reduced. More importantly, the number of cormorants migrating to the area each fall have been reduced by as much as 98 percent.

Protecting Public Health and Safety—Canada geese threaten

public health and safety, property, and crops. The current Canada goose population in New York is approximately 200,000 birds and that number is expected to double every 5 years. WS researchers are working to understand and develop management recommendations related to the impact of Canada geese as vectors for disease, parasites, and noxious weeds. WS biologists provide seminars, one-on-one advice over the telephone, and on-site management assistance to New Yorkers experiencing problems with Canada geese. The New York program addresses more than 200 requests for assistance with geese each year.

Looking to the Future

WS has received requests for the development of an integrated management program to reduce consumption and contamination of animal feed by starlings and other birds at dairy barns. In addition, urban winter crow roosts are emerging as a unique problem for city residents, resulting in problems caused by droppings, noise, odor, and fear associated with zoonotic diseases. West Nile virus, which was first documented in North America in New York in 1999, has since spread to every county in the State. Raccoon rabies also remains a health concern. Finally, concern has been expressed by agricultural producers over the potential introduction of foot-and-mouth disease and chronic wasting disease into New York. WS has the expertise to assist with this vast array of emerging wildlife damage issues.

New York Wildlife Services Funding • • • • •

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

